

ICPS newsletter

Educational policy: A long way to changes

On 17 April 2002, the President of Ukraine issued a Decree "On the Development of a National Education Doctrine". This document superseded the "Education in the 21st Century" State Program, which had been executed only partially, primarily because of its declarative character. In the process of drafting and expert discussions of the doctrine, this fact has also been emphasised. There emerged a necessity to prepare a new additional document with clear-cut proposals as regards mechanisms for the doctrine's realisation, as well as to proceed with discussions of the issue of educational reforms. A key debatable issue, which entails not only "where" but also "how" concerns the creation of educational policy mechanisms. The problem of developing and approving an educational development program, which is within the purview of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine pursuant to Article 85 of the Constitution of Ukraine, is as urgent as ever

Requirements to policymaking

Chapter 5 of the Temporary Regulations issued by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine listed the requirements for the development of conceptual documents, which would foster efficient public policy. The basic requirements are the following:

- analysing the state of affairs and causes of non-execution of previous decisions;
- identifying problems and goals for changes;

- evaluating possible development options, consequences of approving decisions to take into account interests and reactions of all social groups, necessary resources, difficulties and implementation mechanisms.

Unfortunately, while drafting the Doctrine in the format it is presented, the listed requirements were not taken into consideration. We can talk about the educational policy only if the interests of **all** participants in the educational process are

determined and agreed upon. If the government ignores the interests of certain groups, this should be made meaningfully and explicitly, and the government should be ready to take the responsibility for the consequences of such a decision.

Contradictions in policymaking

The initial drafts of the Doctrine differ strikingly from the final one, which includes critical remarks. These changes are depicted in the final draft in the form of a lengthy list of possible proposals. Consequently, such a state of affairs (1) prompts free interpretations of the document and situational prioritisation; (2) raises doubts as to the possibility of realising all the proposals simultaneously. For example, on the one hand, the Doctrine dwells on "increasing the autonomy of educational establishments," and on the other, it is stated that "the state forecasts volumes and defines areas of professional preparation in educational establishments of different types and forms of ownership."

Key interest groups and their expectations regarding educational policy

Social elite

Facilitating the development of society and the place of the country in the global world, retaining the place of the elite and its structure in case of changes. The key criterion for the quality assessment of policy — assuring possibilities to speed up the development of the society and the country, of the restoration of the national elite.

Government, ministries, and departments

Facilitating approval of political decisions and development of instruments for their implementation, and also preserving the levers of power. The key criteria for quality assessment are: for the government — resolution of strategic tasks, and for the state apparatus — manageability of the education system.

Professional groups, including the pedagogical community, namely, teachers, administrators, scholars

Preserving one's profession, social status, as well as extending its influence, no need in such reforms that require changes in the social balance in the group. The key criterion for assessing the quality of policy is compliance with professional norms.

Business

Attraction of investments, revenues from financing certain projects. The key criterion for assessing the quality of policy is the ability of graduates to boost business; the development of the market of educational services.

Educational establishments

Ensuring competitiveness in the struggle for state resources and a place in the market of education and labour for powerful educational establishments, as well as the struggle of many less potent state establishments for benefits and state protection from competition. The key criterion for policy quality assessment are plausible and transparent rules of the game.

National groups

Restoration of national traditions, language. The key criterion of policy quality assessment is accounting for national interests in education.

Parents, public-at-large, the young generation

Ensuring accessibility to high-quality education, involving the new generation of Ukrainians in global economic and cultural integration processes; the prospect of stability, welfare in the country, region, etc. The key criterion for policy quality assessment is efficient expenditures and effective efforts applied by parents and young people, aimed at achieving social success.

People with limited access to education (disabled, single mothers, orphans, the military, etc.)

Ensuring complete integration into social life and possibilities of social career. The key criterion of policy quality assessment is a customised approach in the process of attracting students to education.

Gender equality

Seeking to make the educational system comply with the requirements of the modern understanding of gender issues.

Determining high-quality functional levels of education

(1) The level of education which fosters development: the preparation level of today's elite (historically, 7–10% from the total number of current enrollment)

Key objectives:

- *personalisation of education (capacity to use world education resources to help people to solve exceptional and prospective objectives, possibility to independently define one's own educational trajectory during one's lifespan);*
- *technical support for world education resources .*

(2) A level of education which assures the compliance with the requirements of UNESCO program documents (the 4th and 5th levels of the MSKO–97)

Key objectives:

- *compliance with today's requirements (academic freedoms and institutional autonomy as basic principles of ensuring such a level of correspondence, the continuing diversification of structures, forms, and methods of preparation as a manifestation of such compliance);*
- *quality (as a complex and multi-faceted system of assessing and regulating education: the quality of teaching, training, and researching, which depends on the quality of personnel, programs, level of student training, infrastructure, environment, organisation and management, activity assessment);*
- *internationalisation (thanks to international contacts and cooperation, usage of recognised standards and equipment).*

(3) Minimal basic level of education in accordance with the requirements of the Dakar framework of activity: literacy level for all (the 2nd and 3rd levels of MSKO–97)

Key objectives:

- *expanding activities aimed at protecting and developing children of pre-school age;*
- *universalisation of elementary education;*
- *improving the results of training;*
- *boosting the literacy level of adults;*
- *diversifying basic education services, including teenager and adult training;*
- *accelerated mastering of individual and family knowledge and skills, required for ameliorating one's living standards.*

The text of the Doctrine had to be significantly altered, because of conflicts of interest in some aspects, however, defining and understanding these interests never became the essential parts of the mechanism of educational policy.

Social risks threatening educational reforms

The doctrine envisages only positive changes and it contains no analysis of the causes of the sluggish educational reforms. The reform process is controversial, due not only to insufficient funding, which is often regarded as a principal cause of the current status quo in the education sphere, but also the imminence of social changes, which is not the order of the day and hence, is not the key element of public policy in the sector.

Any changes in the structure of curriculums and forms of teaching, forms of activity assessments, or approaches to setting standards leave their mark on the requirements to personnel and ways of training, as well as on the fact that some educational structures emerge, while others, on the contrary, shut down.

For example, the policy of implementing distance learning modifies the structure and organisation of the market of educational services, and a such status quo will surely trigger drastic social and cultural changes in the sphere of education. Such changes are apparent to most people, thus, its would be naive to expect any support for changes running counter to personal and group interests.

Changes in the perception of the quality of education

In the course of transformation processes, the perception of the quality of education* also undergoes dramatic changes, which will soon be on the agenda of heated social discussions. A quantitative current indicator cannot furnish a plausible picture of changes. Such a lay of the land leads to inadequate managerial decisions regarding educational development. When scoping the issues of education accessibility and quality, one should primarily focus on the search for differentiated criteria of the education policy, instead of optimal unified criteria, fit into the administrative control system.

* For more detailed information, please see the article written by ICPS Deputy Director, Doctor of Cultural Sciences V. Nikitin and published in the newspaper *Dyrektor shkoly*, 2002, Nos. 10 and 14.

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Approaches to policy concerns

Recently, international documents on the development of education put increasing emphasis on the problems of equal and fair access to high-quality education. Such intense attention to this issue can be explained by its great social significance, and also by differences in goals of representatives of different groups of social interests.

These goals set two core approaches:

firstly, the extent of access to basic skills and knowledge, which present opportunities to ensure financial stability;

secondly, the extent of access to skills, knowledge, and competence of the highest level that determine the capacity of groups of people, societies, and states to participate in global development.

International documents as regards equal access to high-quality education can be divided into the two following groups:

- the ones that handle the problem of expanding excess to basic education;
- the ones that dwell on the issue of accessing modern education to facilitate human resource development and development of society.

Analysis of these as well as other documents showed that the criteria of access to education, and especially in the context of quality, differ dramatically: some aim at retaining or enhancing the level of basic education, others endeavour to develop educational technologies. For this reason, similar criteria and approaches in this case cannot be universal.

Questions urging answers

Therefore, educational policy as regards different functional levels should take principally different forms, ranging from tight control and responsibility for literacy among the population to concentration of different social and international resources to support development.

Such an assumption gives grounds to draw the following conclusion: a subsequent policy of uniting interests of different social groups as regarding education and its quality assessment eliminates development opportunities, as well as fails to comply with the current requirements as regards forms of preparing specialists and beau monde.

Here we bump upon the issue: whether it is possible to optimise the existing system of state management of education in order to accomplish transformation objective, to take into account new interests regarding education, its quality and accessibility, as well as other intricate relations in the society. Could it be that such a system will function only if the mechanism of interaction of all interest groups is in effect? What is the mechanism educational policymaking?

Unfortunately, the doctrine, as well as the previous State Program, do not answer these questions. ■

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